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Part-Time Faculty: Semantics and the Meaning of Contingent Teaching

Margaret E. Winters¹

Introduction²

Many years ago, I was fortunate enough to teach a year-long graduate course in my area of specialization at the institution where I had received my Ph.D. one year before. I was otherwise a typical ‘academic gypsy,’ piecing together teaching at a number of schools each semester and normally teaching at a lower division undergraduate level. I was excited and grateful for this opportunity, although the excitement was tempered when I received my letter of offer. My title, according to this letter from the department chair, was to be a *part-time, temporary, partially affiliated instructor*.³ The string of carefully hedged modifiers was mildly amusing at the time, and I remember thinking cynically about how carefully the university was protecting itself against my possible misunderstanding that I was being hired on the tenure track or even full-time. What wasn’t clear then, at least to this very new degree holder, was how many ways I—and others in my situation—were being defined and constrained by the language of the letter of offer. Not only did the title reflect the institution’s view of us, but also the view of the faculty and, to a great extent, our self-image as well.

As a researcher in semantics, I continue to be struck by the variety of titles used for this particular class (or, more correctly as will be expanded on below, these particular classes) of non-tenure-track faculty members. The terms are not random when looked at collectively but ra-

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² I would like to thank my labor-relations colleagues in the United States and Canada who responded to my queries about terms for PTFs and aspects of their contracts. Tom Anderson, Eldonna May, and John Vander Weg read the manuscript and gave me helpful feedback, while my colleague in Linguistics, Geoffrey Nathan, allowed me to talk through the original ideas and provided feedback along the way. All errors in fact and judgment are, however, solely mine.

³ I am not using quotation marks since, after decades, I am not sure of the order of the elements nor of the title (instructor or lecturer). The elements of the title themselves remain fixed in my memory!

ther form a pattern which is indicative of contemporary post-secondary academic employment and culture. More specifically, these titles reflect several characteristics of the faculty who bear them: among others, the fact that they are not in full-time employment, the fact that their contracts are for shorter periods of time than those of tenure-track faculty, and the fact that their contracts reflect an expectation of impermanence in employment. Also expressed in the titles are more nuanced attitudes about these non-tenure-track faculty, how they serve the colleges and universities where they work, what expectations there are for them as employees, and how they are viewed by their colleagues and the administration. Finally, changes in these titles over time point to changing attitudes and, occasionally, the effect of unionization with its collective bargaining agreements on the status of these employees.

This paper explores the semantics of titles for non-full-time, non-tenure track instructors.⁴ It should be noted that this introductory section is intentionally being written to avoid using a label for these academic employees in order not to prejudice the analysis. For ease of expression, however, the term “part-time faculty member” (PTF) ,’ will be used in what follows.

Following this introduction is a semantic analysis of the nomenclature of titles for non-tenure-track faculty whose appointments are not full-time and who may be employed simultaneously at more than one college or university. The analysis uses the notion of a radial—or semantic—set as developed originally by the linguist George Lakoff (1987). It is informed by the linguistically well-established cycle of euphemism and dysphemism, respectively, enhancement in the value of the meaning of a given term and a decrease in that value accorded some other meaning. The analysis is followed by a discussion of how the titles for PTFs is shaped by and shapes attitudes about their employment. The paper concludes with a consideration of what has been occurring in the last few years at some institutions to ameliorate the negative attitudes reflected in or developing with this terminology.

Nomenclature Analysis

The Radial Set - Basics

The basis for the following analysis of terms for PTFs is the Cognitive Semantics descriptive tool of the semantic or radial set as first developed by Lakoff (1987). The analysis takes into account the fact that most linguistic units (words, compounds, even grammatical constructions) are polysemous; that is, they have more than one meaning.⁵ But the meanings are not randomly

⁴ The term ‘instructor’ is not meant to be technical here, as the term for a specific post-secondary rank, but to designate anyone who teaches in a classroom, laboratory, or otherwise interacts pedagogically with students.

⁵ My use of ‘meaning’ is a broad one. It does not refer only to the dictionary sense of a word, but also—and crucially—its uses in context. The decision to talk about meaning in narrower or broader ways is a question for philosophy

related to each other. Rather, they can be understood as organized in the set around the ‘best’ or prototypical instance, the meaning that occurs most frequently, comes to mind most quickly, is usually a single word expression (*brother* rather than *brother-in-law*), and forms the basis for other, less prototypical members of the set, understood as extensions in the meaning of the prototype.

Terms which are applied to non-tenure-track/non-full-time instructors may differ from institution to institution, but the referent, the PTF, remains largely the same. We need to look then at what aspects of these employment positions are most prototypical and which are extensions, where each extension is represented by a distinctive linguistic unit.

This constant description is precisely the one we began to lay out in the introduction: all the terms refer to instructional staff in post-secondary institutions (colleges and universities) who are employed for less than full-time (and often only up to 50% of full-time appointments) and are given relatively short-term contracts. The institutions do not plan to continue to renew these contracts in the way that tenure-track contracts are maintained and do not expect the holder of the employment contract to work exclusively for one institution. What follows next is a proposal for the configuration of this semantic (and employment) category.

The choice of prototype in a radial set is not always straightforward. For the majority of linguistic units (words, compounds, grammatical constructions), the prototype is the simplest term in that it is made up of one word. PTF, however, is probably the most prototypical designation for this class of faculty. It is, based on informal observation of uses in the media and in discussion with colleagues, the most neutral designation even if it does not fulfill the usual criterion of being a simple (one-word) expression. It seems to be the term which is used most frequently and which, probably as a result, comes to mind most quickly despite being a complex compound instead of a simple word. It also requires the least explanation both on- and off-campus (including in the media) as to the nature of the position; this feature as well leads to the impression of salience and the fact that one is not fully employed by a given college or university.

Extending from the prototypical designation of PTFs are several well-defined clusters of titles. The first of these reflects the fact that most such faculty have short-term contracts. The terms ‘fixed term,’ ‘irregular’ and its variant ‘non-regular,’ and ‘contract’ faculty fall into this category. These titles in a literal reading do not reveal the non-tenure-track, non-full-time nature of the positions, although ‘irregular’ does draw attention to their non-prototypicality. In many institutions, tenure-track faculty (that is, those who have not yet obtained tenure) are also on con-

of language and is often based in the theory one adheres to; laying out one or another of the bases for views of the nature of meaning would go far beyond the scope of this paper.

tract and, indeed, for a fixed term. In my university, for example, pre-tenure full-time faculty on the tenure track may receive one-, two-, or three-year renewal contracts until such a time that they successfully earn tenure or leave. Both pre-tenure and part-time faculty, then, hold contracts for a determined length of time. The terms under discussion, however, are used exclusively for PTFs. It is the case that tenure-track and, especially, tenured faculty do not think of themselves as under a contract so the designation for PTFs calls particular attention to the impermanence of their employment. We will return below to the evolution of such terms through the accrual of extended and more specific meaning.

The second extension of meaning derives from the notion that these titles designate instructors who are not fully part of the teaching staff of the institution. One of these is the rather traditional term ‘adjunct,’ literally from the Latin meaning ‘joined to’ or ‘added on.’ It is the only one of these terms which is, if one takes a historical view, at all transparent; the etymology itself reveals the relationship between the instructor and the unit in which s/he teaches. Other terms are somewhat more opaque since, if taken literally, they do not lead to the conclusion that the instructors are part-time. For example, on the surface ‘unit instructor’ could mean any classroom teacher, but it is used only for PTFs. A similar expression is the designation ‘affiliated.’ Although the term itself does not necessitate an understanding of an only partial relationship with the employer, it has as part of its meaning that the relationship is not the standard one of full-time employment and therefore full-time commitment of effort. It is certainly the case that both ‘adjunct’ and ‘affiliated’ faculty may well have other jobs too, either instructional or otherwise; this lack of full commitment is anticipated by the institution (hence the nomenclature) and by the instructors as well. Another term, ‘unit member’ is perhaps in this regard the least informative.

The next set of extensions derives from the non-permanent nature of these positions, rather than the fact that they are not full-time or that they are marked by only partial commitment. These terms are rather more transparent, starting with the simple designation ‘temporary.’ Next, ‘contingent’ points directly toward the fact that being hired is dependent on specific factors, normally the number of classes for which there are no instructors assigned from among the full-time faculty. The term ‘casual’ has a similar source in that it comes from the same word as ‘case’ (labor that is engaged depending on the case, on the circumstances). It seems, however, less modern than the other terms and, perhaps, less respectful of the work force given other meanings of ‘casual’; we will pursue this notion of respect below. Finally we find ‘seasonal’ and, as a variant, the most frequently used term in Canadian English, ‘sessional,’ that is hired for one session, one semester or year at a time rather than with some permanence.

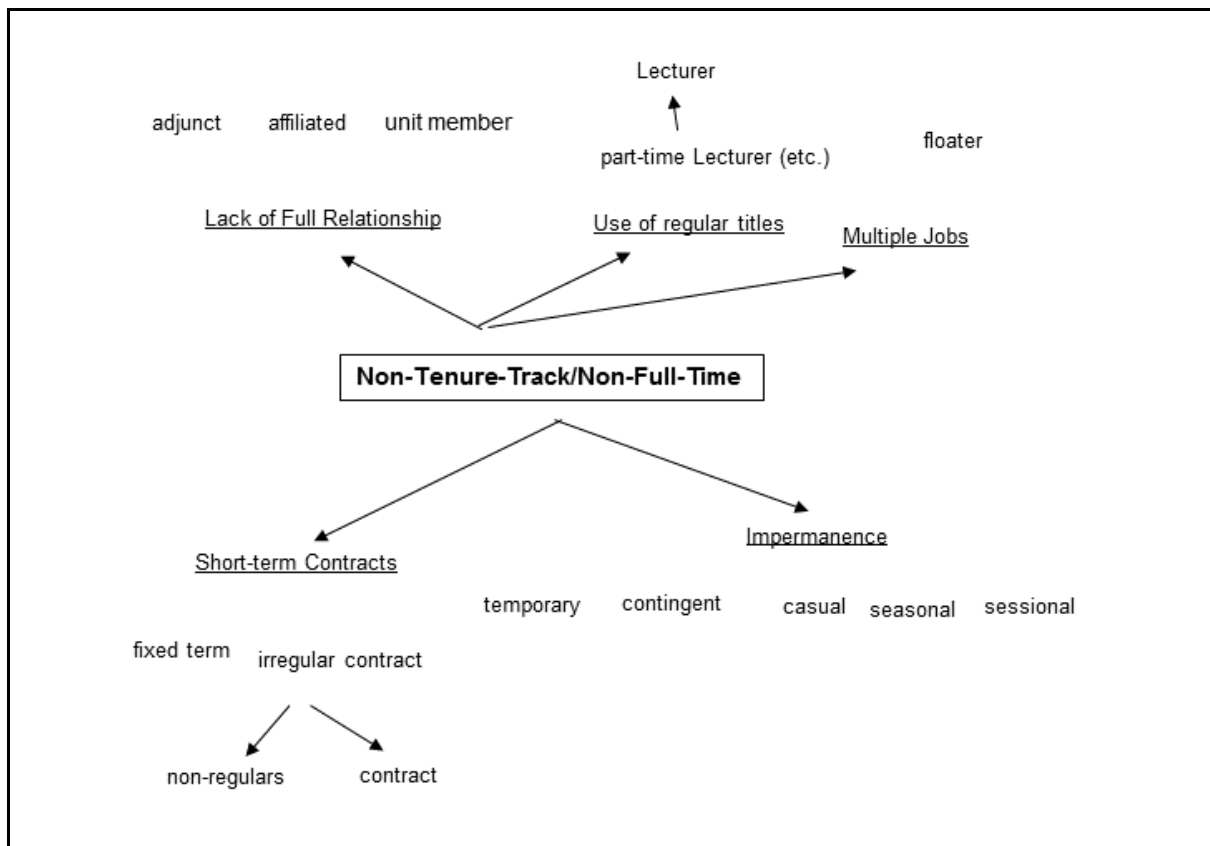
The term ‘floater’ stands alone in this radial semantic set. It is the only term that reflects the fact that such instructors may teach during any one week or even any one day at more than

one institution. Although the result of such employment is usually non-permanence, emphasis here is on the peripatetic nature of many PTFs.

Finally, some institutions simply designate PTFs by terms which are also in use for full-time members of the unit. An extension from the prototypical nomenclature would be to add ‘part-time’ before the title (‘part-time instructor,’ ‘part-time lecturer,’ etc.). With a further change, however, we also find traditionally full-time titles which serve a double purpose, simply ‘lecturer’ or ‘instructor’ where either the term is exclusively for PTFs or is shared with full-time, non-tenure-track instructors.

Figure 1

Terms for PTFs⁶



To summarize, while most radial sets take their point of departure from a single word, providing a graphic, spatial view of the multiple meanings of a single linguistic unit and of the

⁶ See Appendix Table.

lines of association which connect them, in this particular instance the concept is expressed by multiple terms, each differing slightly in reference from one to another.⁷ They do, however, designate members of the same general academic employment category, instructional staff at post-secondary institutions who are neither tenured nor tenure-track and whose employment impermanence is further underlined by specific kinds of employment contracts either individually or collectively bargained. The proposal here is that the terminology employed by various colleges and universities can shed light on varying aspects of the situation of these instructors. In part they simply have unusual—or irregular—contracts when compared to those of tenure-track or tenured faculty. Here we see the terms ‘contract,’ ‘fixed contract,’ and ‘irregular contract.’ Their positions are also viewed as add-ons to the faculty roster rather than being fully members. This subcategory includes ‘adjunct,’ ‘affiliated’ and ‘unit member,’ with varying degrees of terminological clarity as to the nature of the position. The next subcategory calls attention to the expected (and memorialized) impermanence of this employment with terms like ‘temporary,’ ‘casual,’ ‘contingent,’ ‘seasonal,’ and, in Canada, ‘sessional.’ As will be discussed below, none of these titles is considered reassuring and several are even judged as pejorative by those who hold them.

Missing Differentiations

There seem to be multiple aspects of academic life which are not differentiated—or not clearly differentiated—through terminology. First, the terms for PTFs do not discriminate between those who might be called the professional part-timers, those who otherwise practice medicine or law, are school superintendents or engineers, as opposed to those for whom PTF positions are the sole or central source of income. I was unable to find any university where this distinction results in different titles. Secondly, although titles matter in differentiating among academic ranks in general, the terms ‘lecturer’ and ‘instructor’ have no fixed value; there seems to be no difference between one and the other in the context of full- as opposed to part-time employment.⁸ What one teaches is not a relevant means of distinction either; PTFs may teach at any appropriate level depending on the needs of the program and their credentials. It is the case that the level of courses tends to be higher for those we are calling professional PTFs since they are hired to teach their specialty in law, medicine, or, often, administration of various kinds. The

⁷ With very rare counter-examples (and even those are debated) speakers avoid strict synonyms, finding shades of meaning or different contexts for words which might otherwise mean the same thing; consider how ‘horrible’ and ‘awful’ differ in usage. Terms for PTFs do not provide exceptions to this general rule. Not only do they express varying aspects of being a non-tenure-track, non-full-time instructor, but even within these groupings they evoke slightly different meanings and reactions.

⁸ At my institution, full-time non-tenure track faculty are called Lecturers, while Instructors are either paid from grants or designate those who were hired into tenure-track positions but had not yet completed the terminal degree. Elsewhere one or another is used and the percentage of employment does not seem to influence the choice of term.

other PTFs are more often assigned courses within a general education curriculum or lower level courses in the major; English, math, communications, and foreign languages come to mind. Finally, there does not seem to be any terminological distinction between PTF positions which are filled by those who might, potentially over time, be eligible for full-time or even tenure-track lines and those who are meant to be perpetually part-time.

Having noted what is or is not captured by terms for PTFs, let us look at the way in which the terms may change over time.

Euphemism and Dysphemism

Multiple aspects of the meaning of a given word may change over time. Meaning may narrow (*hound* once designated all dogs and not just a certain subgroup), widen (*Kleenex* was originally one brand of paper tissues), and so forth.⁹ Another change may be a reflection of the attitude speakers and hearers have about a given word or expression. When it is a favorable way to refer to something (noun, verb, etc.) or even a way of masking something socially or politically unpleasant with a more polite term, we refer to the meaning as a euphemism and when unfavorable as a dysphemism.¹⁰ When, for example, we want to be politically and socially polite about those without money or those with low-paying jobs, we refer to them as ‘underprivileged,’ ‘unable to make ends meet,’ ‘of modest means,’ or ‘financially embarrassed.’ On the other hand, referring to those with money as ‘over privileged’ or ‘filthy rich’ are dysphemisms, conveying a negative opinion about those who euphemistically might be called ‘comfortable’ or ‘well off.’

What is most interesting about these examples is that they are not necessarily stable over time. What was a euphemism may become the neutral term (equivalent to ‘poor’ or ‘rich’ in the examples just cited; ‘well off’ has probably lost its euphemistic force and is perceived as neither positive or negative) or even as a dysphemism. When a given term becomes negative, there is a tendency to find other, euphemistic ways of referring which then, over time, may become negative in turn and get replaced again. If we look at changes in the use of ‘lady,’ we can see many aspects of this cycle. The origin of ‘lady’ was a high-born woman, but over time, with the growth of the middle class in England, the term was used for wives of merchants as well. Eventually, at least in American English, it became a close synonym to ‘woman’ in a large number of contexts. The word has neutralized, one might say, with the widening of application and loss of the special status of the ‘lady.’ Expressions like ‘lady of the night’ to designate a prostitute were therefore

9. A good overview of semantic change is found in Lyons (1977).

10. The former is part of everyday English while the latter is more usually found as a technical linguistic term. Both are from the Greek, with ‘euphemism’ literally ‘well’ ‘speaking’ and ‘dysphemism’ from ‘bad’ ‘speaking’.

possible and moved the term toward negativity, in at least some contexts. With the women's movement in the 1960s and 70s, 'woman' increased in value as a term, at least among feminists of both genders, taking on connotations of solidarity with the feminist movement. At the same time, the negative connotation of 'lady' grew; it was avoided as demeaning (think of 'girl' as well as in reference to an office assistant). More recently, 'lady' has reappeared on the positive side, first as a term showing in-group membership among women (and used only by them) and then as a term of affection and solidarity used by men and women (think of 'hey lady' as a greeting). The word has, in its history, moved from positive, to negative, and then, to some extent, back again.

Dysphemism and PTF Nomenclature

This cycle of decrease in euphemistic connotation and eventual replacement with a new positive expression can be applied as well to terms for part-time faculty. We will look at such attempts at replacement euphemisms below but first consider the loss of positive meaning in many of these expressions. Not all of the terms, of course, fit this model. Some, like 'part-time' itself, along with 'fixed-term' and 'contract,' if taken out of the context of contemporary academic employment, seem neutral. They arose within universities and colleges to designate a certain state of affairs, neither good nor bad. In time, however, with an increasing gap between the pay scale and security for full-time as opposed to part-time faculty, the terms became devalued. Others, like 'adjunct' seem to have started as more prestigious terms; 'adjunct' as a temporary member of an academic institution, was first cited in 1785 (OED, *s.v.* adjunct) and was, until recently, used to refer chiefly to those professionals who taught in addition to another position. Much later, the term and the condition of employment became less valued. Still others have always been seen as dysphemistic, among them 'casual' and, until recently, 'contingent', in great part because of other meanings of the terms; 'contingent,' for example, is defined in the OED (*s.v.* contingent) as 'liable to chance and change.' We will return below to replacements, but will consider first how attitudes at universities toward PTFs are related to this cycle of loss of positive meaning and eventual replacement. The next section, therefore, will speak very broadly about how university structures, full-time faculty, and PTFs themselves view the position of non-tenure-track, non-full-time faculty.

Attitudes¹¹

The University

Without calling upon many details, since they are very well known, it seems safe to say that universities, and particularly public universities, have relied increasingly on part-time faculty in the last decades. According to the American Association of University Professors, in 1975 some 30% of university faculty were part-time employees. By 2005 the percentage had grown to 48% and at many institutions the number is now over 50% in some disciplines. During the same period, state funding for higher education has decreased, if not in the absolute number of dollars, then in the proportion of operating support universities receive through legislative allocation.¹² More demands are being made on universities as well, from new compliance requirements to a demand for more comfortable student housing and a higher standard for food service to calls for tuition restraint and increased affordability. Costs have had to be cut somewhere, and one of the focal points has been the cost of instruction. PTFs, especially those who are not adding teaching to another high-status professional career (physicians, lawyers, etc.), are very inexpensive in that they are paid by the hour or the course and often do not receive benefits. From a university finance point of view, therefore, PTFs are desirable.

On the other hand, PTFs are a problem for universities on at least two counts. First, they do not have the time or motivation, given low pay, to participate in many aspects of faculty life. Often, because of their circumstances, they arrive on campus, teach their classes, meet required office hours, if any, and leave. As a result they are not as tied to the lives of students and to the health of the academic program as are, on the whole, full-time faculty members. Secondly, public opinion gives them the reputation of being less good teachers than full-time faculty, a reputation which is not always (or even frequently) justified by their performance. They are, as a result of perceptions, a detriment to universities which must, increasingly, compete to recruit students; promises of courses taught to freshmen by “real” professors are increasingly frequent.

11. There may be many exceptions to what follows, but none of the observations is open, I believe, to outright refutation. Of course there are expensive PTFs, those who spend a great deal of time on student retention, and those who have a real presence on campus. But the majority either have full-time jobs as well (the ‘professional’ PTFs) or are managing two or more PTF positions and/or working on degrees at the same time.

12. At my own university, for example, funding by the State was at approximately 65% around 2000; it is now at 33% state support. It should be added that at that earlier time this university enjoyed a higher proportion of state support than many public universities, so the percentage of decrease has been particularly dramatic in the last 15 years.

Tenure-Track Faculty

Tenure-track faculty, by which is meant both those who have tenure and those who were hired with the contractual expectation that they would be eligible to be considered for tenure after a probationary period (pre-tenured faculty on the tenure track), are to some extent ambivalent as well about PTFs. On the one hand, and most saliently, they are perceived as taking away work from the tenure-track. This view is confounded, at least at research universities, by the fact that tenure-track faculty have relatively low teaching loads (as little as one course a semester, often two each semester, and, rarely, two and three or even three and three during the two semesters of the academic year). The employment of part-time faculty allows them to maintain this load and often takes up the slack at the lower-level courses, not considered as fulfilling for many professors as advanced undergraduate or graduate courses. There is, again, an often unfounded sense that they are less successful in the classroom (otherwise, goes the reasoning, why would they not be tenure-track) and—perhaps with more reason—not particularly loyal to the university which employs them.

In unionized (and other) environments, other causes for ambivalence may also occur. Tenure-track faculty often perceive the PTFs as fellow workers, even across the separation of different unions. This attitude of solidarity and fellow-feeling may conflict with the concern that the PTFs are doing tenure-track work at the expense of additional tenure-track faculty. There is a sense, then, that PTFs do lesser work and allow tenure-track faculty to concentrate on higher levels of instruction and their research, but they are considered by many tenure-track faculty members to be fellow academics who are being exploited by the university to manage costs.

Part-Time Faculty

The PTFs themselves may have mixed feelings as well about their position at a university. Let us set aside, for now, those whom I have called ‘professional’ PTFs (e.g. doctors, lawyers, CEOs, and musicians, etc.) who work in another sector and rightly consider their part-time teaching a secondary matter. They teach for the love of teaching and/or the prestige of a university affiliation, but may well have no interest in any closer relationship with a school of medicine, law school, and so on. The PTFs who earn their living predominantly or even solely in the classroom are a different matter. Many of them are eager to be fully employed in a university, are very conscious of the pay difference between them and their full-time colleagues (and with much higher salaries come benefits as well, very often denied to PTFs), and are fully aware as well of

the fact that they are inexpensive solutions who do not have the respect of their colleagues or of the university which employs them.¹³

Summary of Attitudes

In all of these cases we can sum up the attitudes of the PTFs themselves, the universities for which they work, and the full-time faculty with whom they work as ambivalent. There is general recognition that PTFs fill a useful function at universities and colleges and, indeed, contribute to their teaching mission both directly through the courses they teach themselves and indirectly by freeing up full-time tenure-track faculty for research and for teaching higher-level courses. At some universities and colleges their work is recognized through awards and, even more crucially, through access to benefits; the latter recognition is, however, sometimes in the form of permission to buy their own insurance at the university/college rate rather than having it paid by the institution.

On the other hand, PTFs are not given strong motivation to stay loyal to a given university or college and, in fact, often quite literally cannot afford to do so since they may need to teach at several institutions to make ends meet. They are also considered a detriment to any university or college which may want to boast for recruitment purposes that all courses, or a large majority of them, are taught by full-time tenure-track faculty. At a time when demographic swings are lowering the pool of potential undergraduates in a given region, all kinds of perceived value-added features that are believed to attract students take on even more importance.

Semantic Consequences

This ambivalence as to the role and status of PTFs gives rise to a number of consequences, at least some of them linguistic in nature. Universities cannot, often, function without PTFs and may, in some settings and for some disciplines, have to compete for them.¹⁴ And, in addition to practical reasons to court qualified individuals in a scarce pool, university communities are aware of the challenges facing PTFs and may want to provide what they can in the way of—let us say—greater comfort when they cannot provide full-time positions, benefits, or higher wages. This section is an overview of what universities do or do not look to as ways of attracting PTFs and, to some extent, integrating them into the academic community. Most of these measures tend

13. Again it should be said that this is a very general characterization. There are PTFs who have chosen this life because it is compatible, for example, with child-raising and other family obligations; there are those who are fully integrated into the department in which they teach; and there are those who simply prefer part-time employment.

14. Even in urban settings, for example, it is sometimes difficult to find trained and/or credentialed Chinese instructors or those who can teach an introduction to chemistry.

to be low-cost initiatives which demonstrate that PTFs are valued and respected rather than better paid.¹⁵ This section will consider measures taken, in particular, the question of titles and increased respect.

Titles

A somewhat flippant response to a question about titles for PTFs, paraphrasing Shakespeare, was “adjuncts—a rose by any other name is the same” (J. Castagnera, personal communication, May 12, 2015). This is not, however, the case; at various times and at various institutions, PTFs have asked to have their titles changed (or at least the general designation). In a recent email to a national forum, a negotiator reported, for example:

We are currently in bargaining with our faculty and the union is pushing us to drop the term “adjunct” from the CBA. They argue that the term has negative connotations. They have suggested “Visiting Instructor” as an alternative, though that idea has not been warmly received by the administration (they aren’t really “visiting” from anywhere).

There are interesting aspects to this quotation: first there is a clear statement that some designations are more positive (or euphemistic) than others. While previously ‘adjunct’ might, arguably, have been considered a prestigious rank, bestowed on professionals who fulfilled their dream of being affiliated with a university, it has become the designation of those whose employment was short-term and uncertain. Note the recommendation of a different title; it is one which does not make the position any less uncertain, but, by proposing ‘instructor’ the PTFs relate it to an employment title which is often full-time, although not tenure-track. The addition of ‘visiting’ is more problematic; increasingly, universities are reserving that title for those who quite literally visit from another institution from which they are on leave. What we are seeing, therefore, is an attempt to change the downward cycle of dysphemism by changing the term in use, not by popular usage, but through the mechanism of contract negotiation. In general, the cycle of euphemism and dysphemism can be illustrated by looking at titles for PTFs. In several universities, the term used is ‘lecturer,’ a term which, like ‘instructor,’ is also used for full-time, although non-tenure-track faculty. The terms may be used as such or may be joined with modifiers such as ‘temporary,’ ‘associate,’ or, directly, ‘part-time.’

15. A recent survey found that PTFs, in fact, often feel that their situation would be ameliorated with an increase of respect, that is, treatment more like that of full-time faculty. Among the examples cited were teaching awards and development opportunities (Flaherty 2015). PTFs at my institution have gained in contract negotiations the opportunity to serve on departmental committees for the same reasons.

Promotion Lines

The second way in which PTFs believe they are improving their position is through the use of promotions. While such promotions do not necessarily extend contract length or security,¹⁶ they serve as recognition of long and good service. The promotional titles may reflect professorial rank ('associate' PTF, whatever the PTF title may be) or may rather signify that the promotion line is, indeed, a separate one. In this class is 'senior' PTF, again, whatever the PTF title may be. Other institutions, like my own, designate promotion levels numerically; one goes from PTF1 to PTF2 to PTF3 through a procedure based on merit and achievement.

Inclusion

Finally, as was mentioned above, PTFs are accorded respect through greater inclusion in department life. They have, in some cases, acquired the right to serve on committees¹⁷ and in others must consider a victory that they have a place to meet students or sit to prepare for teaching. Institutions are also either including PTFs in eligibility for teaching awards or are developing such awards exclusively for PTFs. Orientation sessions and other development opportunities would fall as well under this rubric. It is the case, however, that these inclusive practices do not or not yet have an impact on titles. Rather they reflect a growing belief that PTFs are a necessary aspect of post-secondary instruction.

Other Potential Practices

Not all actions which might ameliorate the situation of PTFs are necessarily commonly applied, however. It is the case that PTFs very rarely change their positions—and with that change their titles—by having privileged access to full-time, tenure-track positions. They can, of course, apply and compete with others for the tenure-track positions as they are advertised at institutions where they work. There is certainly no tradition of special access and there does not seem to be any movement toward establishing it, as there is to finding dedicated promotion lines or development and recognition opportunities. What this seems to indicate is a lack of any feeling that PTFs are in this sense the equals tenured/tenure-track faculty. The result is that the titles they bear continue to keep them intentionally separate.

16. Some institutions have now extended greater job security to PTFs after a certain length of satisfactory service. This is a practice which is applied with caution, however, since PTFs (in theory!) are meant to provide flexibility to the college or university, a way of making sure that courses are taught, but that regular faculty are not left with insufficient assignments, particularly in times of budget difficulties or enrollment decline.

17. In the case of my institution, there is a small stipend for attending obligatory meetings beyond a certain base number, but, since committee membership is voluntary, there is an understanding that there will be no payment for attendance.

Conclusion

To summarize, PTF titles can be analyzed in terms of their contrast to tenure-track and tenured faculty. The titles, it should be remembered, are used both for those PTFs who teach in addition to other, often prestigious, jobs and for those for whom part-time teaching is their sole source of income. The characteristics of the positions which were outlined above (see figure 1) remain the same for both types of PTFs. First, they are not full-time employees of colleges and universities. They are, as a result, granted special, short-term, contracts. There is no expectation, at least on the part of the institution, that their employment will continue. They may, in fact, hold positions at two or more institutions at the same time, ‘floating’ from one to another. In short, they have a different relationship with the institution(s) and this relationship is reflected in one or another version of their titles. Many of the titles used to designate PTFs are, of themselves, neutral in character, neither particularly euphemistic or dysphemistic. However, given attitudes others have toward PTFs and their own frustration at being shut out from permanent, better paying and higher prestige employment (not attributable to all, but many non-tenure-track, non-full-time instructors), many of the titles are considered demeaning and may be changed in an attempt to make them more respectable, either by policy or as part of negotiations between the institution and unionized PTFs. A recent trend is to use ‘contingent’ in collective bargaining contracts as a title indicating an increased level of respect; this is an example of a relatively rare shift from dysphemism toward euphemism.¹⁸

It may seem, perhaps, trivial to dwell on titles, on labels assigned to a certain class of employees at colleges and universities. I would argue, on the contrary, that the examination of titles allows us to consider what some of the components of the professional life of PTFs are and how, to some respect, they approach collective bargaining. The titles bring to the fore the impermanence of their employment and the many ways they are kept distinct from professorial ranks. An increasing number of institutions are, indeed, recognizing this difference and finding ways, either of their own volition or across the bargaining table (and perhaps in some cases as a mix of the two) to find promotion and merit without tenure and titles which start at least at a neutral, if not positive, point in the cycle of euphemism and its descent into dysphemism. These repairs matter and drive home the need for linguistic, as well as more material respect for PTFs.

¹⁸ I thank Jeffrey Cross for this example.

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Appendix

Table 1

Part-Time Faculty Meanings, Terms, and Descriptions

| Semantic Meaning/Term | Description |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Impermanence | |
| Casual | Called upon for occasional (etymologically ‘accidental’) work |
| Contingent | Called upon depending on (last-minute) need |
| Seasonal | Hired for a specific length of time by the season or term |
| Sessional | Hired for a specific length of time, by college/university session |
| Temporary | Hired with no expectation of continuation or permanence |
| Lack of Full Relationship | |
| Adjunct | Attached, added on |
| Affiliated | In a relationship to an institution (etc.) but not employed fully by it |
| Unit Member | Hired into a department or other institutional division, with the implication of not being a tenured or tenure-track member of the unit |
| Multiple Positions | |
| Floater | One who teaches at several institutions, either simultaneously or serially |
| Short-Term Contracts | |
| Contract | Hired under a short-time agreement |
| Fixed Term | Hired under an agreement with a defined end point |
| Irregular Contract | Hired under an agreement unlike that of tenured or tenure-track faculty |
| Non-Regulars | Variation of ‘irregular contract’ |
| Other Titles | |
| Instructor/Lecturer | Same title as full-time non-tenure-track faculty |
| Part-Time Instructor/ Lecturer | Clarification of temporary status despite full-time implications in the titles |